Soderbergh says cinema must fight to stay relevant

Ocean's Eleven director critiques bloating movie ideas into TV series

By Irfan Aslam

DOHA: Renowned Hollywood filmmaker Steven Soderbergh presented his new film, *The Christophers*, at the Doha Film Festival this past weekend, and used the platform to discuss the challenges cinema is facing in the digital age, the evolution of storytelling, and the underlying tension between art and commerce.

Before the screening of his latest project, the *Ocean's Eleven* director spoke to select members of the media about the philosophical underpinnings of his work. He explained that the genesis of *The Christophers* stemmed from thoughts on legacy.

"When we are gone, we live on in the memories of other people that we worked with, whether friends or family, and the importance of the stories," Mr Soderbergh said.

"What kind of stories do you want to recreate as a person and as an artist? That's what I was thinking about when we were making this film."

Regarding his approach to filmmaking, Mr Soderbergh dismissed a strict preference between social or commercial cinema, stating that he focuses primarily on the story.

He suggested that two valid forms of film exist: those that portray the world as one wishes it were, and those that portray the world as it actually is. "I think both of these forms are valid," he said.

Mr Soderbergh also highlighted the vital role of film festivals in an era dominated by digital content.

"In the 21st century there are so many formats for storytelling that cinema has to fight to maintain its place and film festivals are one of the ways in which the cinema continues to reach people," he said.

"My career started at a film festival but I hope it does not end here," Mr Soderbergh joked, drawing laughter from the audience. He emphasised the communal power of the medium, noting that a group gathering to watch a single thing remains "a very special experience."

Touching on cross-cultural collaboration, Mr Soderbergh described the process of artists coming together as one of the most efficient bridges between cultures due to the "commonality of the DNA of telling stories".

The *Erin Brockovich* director advocated for a system where artists can collaborate with cultures they are not otherwise exposed to.

When asked if he preferred film over television, Mr Soderbergh categorically said "no".

He noted that he enjoyed the larger canvas of television, citing his experience on *The Knick*, which featured two seasons of 10 hours each. However, he warned against the unnecessary expansion of narratives.

"But there are certain ideas that are movie ideas and I think we all have the experience of seeing TV shows in which we felt like 'I don't know if six hours was necessary. It's an interesting idea but it could have been a movie,'" he said.

"Sometimes I see the expansion of a story into a series, which I am not sure should have been expanded."

The Christophers, a dark comedy shot in just 19 days, marks an example of Soderbergh's minimalist cinema. First screened at the Toronto International Film Festival in September, the film is set almost entirely within an untidy London flat.

The story follows Julian Sklar, played by Ian McKellen, a retired painter who withholds his earlier works from his children.

The children, eager to claim the expensive art, hire a new assistant named Lori, played by Michaela Coel. Lori, a struggling young artist, faces a moral dilemma as she is part of a conspiracy to complete the painter's unfinished 'Christophers' series through forgery.

New *X* feature reveals surprising origins of Trump 'fan accounts'

OVER the weekend, *X* (formerly Twitter), rolled out a new feature which allows users to see the country or region where the social media platform believes an account is based.

The feature, called "about this account", can be accessed from any user's bio and identifies the country or region through which they often connect to *X*, *BBC News* reported.

The feature has revealed some interesting details: for example, some notable accounts with a history of posting content supportive of President Donald Trump, which generate a large amount of engagement, are actually located outside of the US.

Just two days ago, Trump shared on Truth Social a screenshot of a post from an *X* account called @TRUMP_ARMY_ celebrating a Supreme Court ruling in his favour.

This account, which has more than half a million followers, is based in India and has changed its username four times since joining the platform in March 2022, according to *X*.

Many of these accounts have previously claimed they are American or based in the US.

Separately, the account @IvankaNews_, which describes itself as a fan account for Trump's daughter, has gathered more than one million followers by posting multiple times a day in support of the president and the wider 'Make America Great Again' movement.

This user previously claimed to have voted for the president in the 2024 election.

But the account is based in Nigeria and has changed its username 11 times since 2010, according to *X*.

Similarly, *BBC Verify* reported that several accounts claiming to be from Scotland and almost exclusively posting in favour of Scottish independence. But based on *X*'s location feature, these accounts have been accessing the platform from Iran.

One account, Ewan McGregor, claims to be based in Dundee. "Polls can be hidden, but momentum cannot. Independence is already in motion," it posted three days ago.

Another user who claims to be in Glasgow, Alisa Stewart, posted this on Saturday: "Generations shift, but freedom endures. Scotland's independence is timeless, beyond demographics."

But *X*'s location data indicated that both were based in the Netherlands and accessing *X* via the Android app in Iran.

Since their location data was made available by *X*, both users have manually changed them to display a region rather than a country.—Monitoring Desk

Bollywood icon Dharmendra passes away at 89

By Our Correspondent

NEW DELHI: Veteran Indian actor Dharmendra passed away in Mumbai on Monday after having been in and out of Mumbai's Breach Candy hospital for several days earlier this month.

A police statement said funeral arrangements were being made at the a crematorium in Mumbai's Ville Parle suburb.

According to eyewitnesses, an ambulance and several cars left Dharmendra's Juhu residence and Hema Malini, Esha Deol, Aamir Khan, Amitabh Bachchan and Abhishek Bachchan were seen at the crematorium.

Salman Khan and his father, script writer Salim Khan, were also spotted there.

Many celebrities including Karan Johar, Kajol, Ajay Devgn and Kareena Kapoor mourned the actor's death on social media. Johar called Dharmendra's death as the end of an era.

Dharmendra, born Dharam Singh Deol in Punjab in 1935, enjoyed a remarkable six-decade career, featuring in over 300 films and headlining classics such as *Sholay*, *Chupke Chupke*, *Satyakam*, *Anupama*, *Seeta Aur Geeta* and many others.

He was widely celebrated for his versatility across action, romance and comedy.

Dharmendra is survived by his wives Prakash Kaur, Hema Malini, sons Sunny and Bobby Deol, and daughters Vijeta, Ajeeta, Esha and Ahana.

Agencies add: Dharmendra was lovingly known as the "He-Man" of Bollywood, thanks to his roles in a string of action movies that cemented his legacy spanning more than six decades and 250 films.

Born Dharam Singh Deol on Dec 8, 1935, in Punjab, he also served as a member of parliament and was honoured with one of India's highest civilian awards.

He struck stardom after becoming the first Bollywood actor to bare his chest on screen, prompting a flood of love letters from women.

Dharmendra moved to Mumbai in 1958 after winning a celebrity magazine's talent competition.

"I only had my dreams," he told biographer Rajiv Vijayakar. "I was an untutored villager, with no idea of acting."

His matinee-idol looks quickly caught the eye of producers, and he made his screen debut in 1960 with the melodrama *Dil Bhi Tera Hum Bhi Tere*.

It was in the lead role in the 1966 drama *Phool Aur Patthar*, that he appeared topless.

"When he whipped off his shirt in the film, for the first time filmmakers woke up to the need to cater to female sexuality," noted the *Encyclopaedia of Indian Cinema*.

Over the years, Dharmendra shared the screen with leading stars like Nutan, Meena Kumari, and Sharmila Tagore, but his most enduring partnership was with Hema Malini, Bollywood's first woman superstar from the south.

Their irresistible chemistry in films such as the 1972 hit *Seeta Aur Geeta* and *Sholay* blossomed into a real-life romance.

Their 1980 wedding ruffled many feathers, as Dharmendra refused to divorce his first wife, Prakash Kaur. He and Malini had two daughters.

The controversy did little to dim his popularity. Fans continued to cheer for *Garam Dharam* in theatres across India.

DHARMENDRA celebrates his 88th birthday at his residence in Mumbai on Dec 8, 2023.—AFP

MAE AI: Tip Kamlue, a Shan farmer in Myanmar's Tha Ton district, poses for a picture in her fields on the banks of the Kok river. She irrigates her crops with groundwater instead of the Kok's water due to increasing rare earth and gold mining at the river's source.—Reuters

MPs quiz senior figures about *BBC*'s troubles

Monitoring Desk

MICHAEL Prescott, a former editorial adviser who raised concerns about *BBC* reporting including Panorama's edit of a Donald Trump speech, spoke on the matter in public for the first time on Monday when he appeared in front of a House of Commons committee.

An internal memo written by Prescott was leaked to the press earlier this month, leading to the resignations of the *BBC*'s director general and head of news earlier this month.

Prescott faced tough questions from MPs, who asked them to give their views on the state of the *BBC* and its journalism, and give their accounts of events behind the scenes.

On Friday, one board member, Shumeet Banerji, resigned over "governance issues" at the top of the corporation, which *BBC* media editor Katie Razzall said "looks like a direct critique of" Shah.

Banerji's departure made Monday's committee hearing "even more critical" for Shah, Razzall added.

(According to *Reuters*, Prescott told the hearing that "I do not think *BBC* is institutionally biased", but that the broadcaster did have "editorial failings", and he had hoped his criticisms would help fix them.

"Let's be very clear, tons of stuff the *BBC* does is world-class, both factual programming and non-factual programming.")

Prescott said the BBC's British political reporting was exemplary, but he had written his memo, which he also sent to the media regulator and the government, because he believed there were "systemic causes" behind the problems he had found.

"What I was frequently seeing was that the *BBC*'s idea of dealing with something was to change the editors around, tweak the written guidelines, but there was never, it seemed to me, any willingness (to look) at exactly what went wrong and whether there were deep implications," he said.

The role of Sir Robbie, a former *BBC* senior editor and director of communications for conservative prime minister Theresa May, is also expected to come under scrutiny.

Director general Tim Davie and CEO of News Deborah Turness resigned following criticism after Prescott's memo was reported by the *Telegraph*.

In a subsequent letter to the parliamentary committee, Shah apologised for the "error of judgement" when two sections of Trump's speech on 6 January 2021 were edited together in an episode of Panorama.

Prescott's memo also raised concerns about other "troubling matters" including "systemic problems" of bias in BBC Arabic's coverage of the Israel-Gaza war, and one-sided coverage of trans issues.

The committee's chairwoman, Conservative MP Caroline Dinenage, has said Davie's departure was "regrettable" but that "restoring trust in the corporation must come first".

Political influence 'a concern'

The latest crisis has sparked a wider debate about the future of the BBC and the state of its news output, including claims of institutional bias and political interference.

Culture Secretary Lisa Nandy has said the perception of political influence is "a problem", and that there is "a real concern, which I share, that political appointments to the board of the BBC damaged confidence and trust in the BBC's impartiality".

She pledged to examine the issue as part of the corporation's next charter review.

Sir Robbie was appointed to the BBC board by the Conservative government in 2021, and has been accused of interfering in editorial decisions.

He sits on the *BBC* board's editorial guidelines and standards committee (EGSC) alongside Shah, Davie and Thomson, who is the *BBC*'s former chief operating officer.

The parliamentary committee said Monday's session would focus on the EGSC's "processes and how it ensures output complies with the *BBC*'s editorial guidelines".

Prescott, a former *Sunday Times* political editor, and Daniel, a former FT assistant editor, advised the EGSC about "editorial risks and issues" after being appointed as the *BBC*'s first "external editorial experts" in 2022.

On Sunday, the Guardian reported the *BBC* was looking to expand the EGSC as part of reforms, which is understood to be accurate.

It is possible that having a bigger cast could help it to scrutinise issues better, and ensure no one individual can dominate proceedings.

The Guardian also reported the *BBC* will look to add a new deputy director general role, after concerns that the job is too much for one person.

There have been deputy director generals in the corporation previously.

Diplomats say Saudi booze ban eased for select foreigners

RIYADH: Diplomats and premium visa-holders in Saudi Arabia said that the government has quietly eased restrictions on purchasing alcohol for select foreign residents.

While the government has not made any statements regarding the sale of alcohol in recent days, the sources said non-Muslim individuals with premium resident status are now able to buy booze at the country's sole alcohol shop in Riyadh, which was previously reserved for diplomats.

According to diplomats and residents with premium visa status, the rules had changed.

"I heard about it from friends who tried it. I went there two days ago and it actually worked," one premium visa-holder said on condition of anonymity.

"It saved me a lot of money rather than buying from the black market. Prices are reasonable and we finally can buy alcohol."

Despite repeated attempts, Saudi authorities could not be reached for comment on the reports. However, they did not respond by the time the story was published.—AFP

Italy outraged after court splits up off-grid family

ROME: A court decision to remove three children from their Anglo-Australian family's home in the woods has become a political flashpoint in Italy, where there is wider debate over alleged judicial overreach.

Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni -- leader of a hard-right government that champions family values -- is reportedly concerned about the case near Chieti, in the eastern Abruzzo region, where the family has been living off-grid since 2021.

On Thursday, the juvenile court of nearby Aquila suspended the couple's parental responsibility and ordered the transfer of the children to a protective home with their mother.

The court cited poor sanitary conditions at the home, and the unauthorised homeschooling of the couple's eight-year-old girl and six-year-old twin boys.

The decision prompted a wave of verbal attacks and threats online against the judge, while a petition to "save the family that lives in the woods" has gathered over 135,000 signatures.

Italy's deputy prime minister and leader of the far-right League party, Matteo Salvini, has called the judge's actions "unworthy, worrying, dangerous and shameful", describing it as a "kidnapping" of the minors.

"Judges and social workers in Abruzzo, don't be a nuisance," he said, pointing to a need for judicial reform.

- 'Without stress' - Defending their lifestyle as one "without stress" and in harmony with nature, Australian Catherine Birmingham and Briton Nathan Trevallion told national broadcaster Rai this month that their children were "growing up better" in their home in the woods.

A tour of the home given to Rai showed a wood-burning stove in a kitchen, colourful children's beds covered with stuffed animals, and Christmas lights strewn about the home.

Electricity is provided from solar panels, while the toilet is compostable and located in a shack outside, where a donkey, horse, dogs, cats, chickens and ducks roam a clearing among the trees.

"The children are happy, healthy. We haven't done anything wrong if we want to return to nature," Birmingham told Rai in halting Italian.

But local media has reported that the children are not vaccinated and do not go to school, with the parents having failed to submit their request for homeschooling to local authorities.

Social workers were called last year after one of the couple's children ingested poisonous mushrooms and was taken to hospital, reports said.

- Political factions - The power of judges has generated public debate in Italy, as Meloni's flagship justice reform -- which includes separating the careers of judges and prosecutors -- heads for a referendum next year.

Judges have decried interference by the government, saying the reform will curb their independence, while the government accuses the judiciary of political bias.

Magistrates associations have defended the Aquila court's decision to remove the children and slammed what they called exploitation of the case for political purposes. "We reject any form of exploitation expressed in recent days by some political factions and the media, which fail to consider the complexity and sensitivity of the rights in question," said the Italian Association of Magistrates for Minors and for the Family.

In a press release, it noted that the court's decision came after a year-long observation period "during which the court's orders were systematically disregarded by the parents".

On Monday, the Superior Council of the Judiciary (CSM), which is tasked with judicial independence and disciplinary matters, opened a procedure to protect the magistrates in question.

It said recent statements from politicians "go beyond legitimate criticism of a judicial act and end up directly affecting the work of the magistrates of the Juvenile Court, exposing them to undue pressure, including through the media".

A lawyer for the British father and Australian mother, Giovanni Angelucci, did not respond to requests for comment.—AFP

EXTENSION NOTICE

BID CLOSING & OPENING DATE

Reference our Tender Notice(s) published in newspapers, it is notified that the bid submission/opening dates of the following cases are extended as follows:

S. #	TENDER NO.	DESCRIPTION	REVISED CLOSING DATE & TIME
1.	OGDCL-SCM-LBB-CNESS-OGTI-DOC301096646-2025	RENOVATION OF OGTI HOSTEL ROOMS WITH ATTACHED BATHROOMS (32 NOS.), INCLUDING CORRIDORS (03 NOS.), IN THE OFFICER'S WING, I-9, ISLAMABAD	01.12.2025 AT 1130 HRS
2.	OGDCL-SCM-SERVICES-CB-RM-299419833-2025	HIRING OF SERVICES FOR INSPECTION AND REFURBISHMENT OF OGDCL DRILLING RIG N-1	09.12.2025 AT 1030 HRS

2. Bidders who have already submitted/ sent their proposals (bids) may take them back and re-submit the same before the revised closing date and time mentioned above.
3. All bids will be opened 30 minutes after the bids closing date/ time.
4. Tender Notice/ detailed instructions are available on Public Procurement Regulatory Authority (PPRA) website at www.ppra.org.pk.
5. Tender documents are available online and bids are also required to be submitted online through e-procurement portal at https://ogdcl.com/sap-ariba-tenders or https://discovery.ariba.com/profile/AN01562899621. For details see "Instruction for Bidders Section" of the tender documents.
6. OGDC reserves the right to accept or reject any bid and to annul the bidding process and reject all the bids as per Public Procurement Regulatory Authority (PPRA) Rule-33.

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